

132 nearer to the sea (Innes, 1908: 270). The temperature varies from 70° to 90° and humidity is always high. Unlike most of the great kingdoms of India, Kerala had no single great river and no extensive, centrally organized irrigation system. Instead, her cultivated crops and lush vegetation depended on the heavy rainfall and numerous small rivers and streams by means of which small-scale irrigation was easily possible to groups of families.

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[241] 132 Further, the heavy rainfall, seasonal floods, and hilly terrain made communications difficult until modern times. Before the partial conquest of Kerala by Mysoreans from the northeast in 1766, there were no roads, wheeled vehicles, or pack animals. The kings maintained small cavalry forces only in the coast towns, traveled in palanquins, and employed runners to carry messages to their vassal chiefs. Goods were dragged downstream by elephants, transported in boats, or carried on the backs of men. Armies moved slowly; local nobles sometimes rebelled against their rulers but warfare was abandoned in the heavy southwest monsoon season from May to September. The difficulty of communications and the lack of a centrally organized irrigation system may have been connected with the fact that Kerala had no regular land tax until the 1730's (*ibid.*: 308). Instead, the revenues of her rulers came from tribute in kind supplied by subordinate nobles, and from taxes levied upon overseas trade (Logan, 1951, II: ccxviii; Innes, 1908: 307-308).

439 In spite of the overseas trade, most of Kerala's villages were traditionally self-sufficient for the basic necessities of life. Quantities of manufactured goods were brought to Kerala's ports from other parts of India for shipment to the Middle East, but indigenous crafts such as weaving, metalwork, pottery, and basketry remained simple and served local needs. Kerala thus had no large urban castes of craftsmen and no indigenous merchant castes, but only immigrant communities of Syrian Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and, later, European merchants and Hindu merchants from other kingdoms of India, all concentrated in the coastal towns. The limited nature of trade and crafts and the comparative self-sufficiency of village life also help to account for the relatively decentralized political structure.

History

175 Little is known of Kerala until the first century A.D. It then formed part of the kingdom of Chera, whose capital was probably east of the Ghats at Karur on the Kaveri River in the modern Trichinopoly district. Chera, like its companion South Indian kingdoms, Chola and

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exponents. Marriages at all levels between the religious and secular hierarchies pointed up this interdependence. 564
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Among the Nayars hypergamy must also have cemented lord-vassal relationships. Older Nayars still take pride in the fact that their lineages have for centuries been fathered by chiefs, royals, and Brahmans. Traditionally, it was for the sake of this generalized filial bond that they were prepared to die in battle and, paradoxically, to deny themselves paternal rights in their own children.

Matrilineal Units of the Nayar Retainer Castes

THE CLAN

The clan was the largest matrilineal unit to which a Nayar commoner belonged. Its members believed themselves descended from a common ancestress, but her name was not normally remembered and the exact genealogical relationships between a clan's subordinate segments were often unknown. Occasionally, all of a clan's known members lived within a single Nayar neighborhood (*tara*). In this case the clan was co-terminous with the next lower order of matrilineal unit, which I call the lineage. More commonly, the clan had a nucleus of members within the neighborhood from which it originally sprang, together with outlying segments whose forebears had moved to other neighborhoods of the chiefdom. Clan affiliations among Nayar retainers do not seem to have extended beyond the chiefdom. 614
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The clan was called a *taravād*, the word also used for the lineage and the matrilineal household unit. "Taravād" is derived from "tara," meaning "mound,"* in this case the raised foundation on which a Nayar house was built. Its members derived a sense of unity from the belief that their matrilineal forebears sprang from the same ancestral house, and if the site of this house still existed they retained a sentimental attachment to it. The word "taravād" (befitting for a settled agricultural people) was in fact equivalent to the English "house" in its sense both of ancestry and of place. The clan was usually called by the name of its original ancestral house site. 192
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The clan was exogamous and sex relations within it were forbidden. Those of its members who lived near and met often used kinship terms to address each other. If a death or birth occurred, clan members had to be informed by messenger. Upon receipt of the informa- 834
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* Any kind of raised foundation of earth or laterite is called a *tara*. *Tara* (meaning "neighborhood") is derived from the large platform of earth round a sacred "milk-exuding tree (*alstonia scholaris*) located near the Nayar neighborhood temple of Bhagavadi. The neighborhood assembly congregated on this mound. 623

which precede or follow it.¹ Information is then given to the relatives, and friends of the family regarding the performance of the ceremony on a certain date, when invitations are sent around to those that should attend the wedding. The ceremony then opens with a fixing of the post² for the erection of a pandal, which is tastefully decorated and in which the ceremony is performed. The male members of the village are invited and treated to a feast followed by the distribution of betel leaf, arecanuts and tobacco for chewing.³ In the Cochin State, every time the ceremony is performed in a privileged family, or in one wishing to obtain privileges, a member thereof visits His Highness the Raja with presents (*thirumulkāzha*), and requests his permission for the celebration. Similar presents are also made to the Nambuthiri *jennies* by their tenants and others attached to the *illams*. It is interesting to note that certain privileges, such as sitting on grass mats, having a procession with an elephant, beating of drums, firing of pop-guns, worshipping of the Sun on a platform especially constructed, have often to be obtained from the ruler of the State.⁴ Then follows the *Ashtamangalyam Vekkal* (procession to the marriage pandal to place the eight auspicious things, namely rice, paddy, tender leaves of cocoanut trees, an arrow, a looking glass, a well washed cloth, lighted fire, and a small wooden box called *cheppu*) which is a formal beginning of the ceremony, or if necessary, earlier still, and for which a *Brahmani* is invited. On the night previous to the ceremony, the girl neatly dressed and adorned in her best is taken by her caste-women to a reserved spot in the house (*Patinnōttu Iruttal*, seating on the western side), where some ceremonies are gone through, and the *Brahmani* or *Pushpini* entertains the party with her songs, chiefly *Purāṇic*. Soon after, the girl and the female members of the family, dressed in gay attire and decked with costly ornaments, come out in procession to the pandal where the

1. The village astrologer is entitled to be formally invited. He makes certain predictions at the sight of the messenger about the results of the marriage. When he arrives at the gate of the house, he is formally received, and he makes certain other predictions from the movement of the flame of a lamp as to the result, happy or otherwise, of the marriage. In the latter case, he suggests some remedies.
2. For this also an auspicious hour is fixed by the astrologer.
3. A few important members sit together and prepare a kind of list for the purchase of provisions for the feast and other expenses.
4. Such privileges are permanently enjoyed by certain aristocratic families. Some obtain them on marriage occasions.

631 and the Rajas were mostly guided by their own will and pleasure unless it ran counter to the customs of the country. Many
 643 of them had learned Brahmans to instruct them in the fundamental and long established laws of the country.
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646 Certain checks upon their arbitrary power existed in the form of general assemblies of the nation, but these were seldom held. These were of two kinds: those assembled under the orders of the Raja, and those assembled by the spontaneous will of the people. In the former case, messengers, who by
 203 right of birth and descent were entitled to that office, were despatched in all directions to summon the people. When
 428 assembled, they sat in a circle in the open air, while a number of Nayars kept guard over them. The propositions were then discussed, and the measures proposed were rejected or adopted by the unanimous silence or clamour of those present, but in affairs of minor importance not affecting the welfare of the whole community, the chiefs of the nation were summoned, and they decided the questions laid before them.

643 The assemblies summoned by the will of the nation were
 646 conducted in much the same manner, but with more impetuosity. They were held only in cases of emergency, when the Raja
 578 was guilty of extreme tyranny or of gross violation of the law. Then all the landed proprietors were bidden to attend, and if any one dared to refuse to obey the summons, the assembly
 687 sentenced his houses, gardens or estates to be devastated. If he persisted in his disobedience, he would be deprived of his privileges and votes, and might even be sentenced to banishment. As the object of such assemblies was to thwart the will of the ruler, he on his side did all he could to obstruct their holding such assemblies. The Raja had no right nor power to prevent them by force of arms, but he sent *Pandara Patti* (servants of the rulers) to provoke them with all manner of annoyances and to pelt them with stones, sand, and dirt. The Nayars on guard did their best to keep off the assailants with their shields, and, if any one of them, provoked beyond endurance, were to strike or hurt one of the youths, it would be regarded as treason, and, as such, the assembly could be liable to a heavy fine and would be deprived of its inviolability. The Raja might then disperse them by force of arms; but if he failed to subdue them, they would all desert their allegiance. Allies and neighbours did their best to intercede between the parties and to secure for everyone his proper
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played. There are also other kinds of plays, which are called *Attakkathas* (plays in which the incidents are represented by dancing and gestures) in Travancore, and *Kuthakalis* in Malabar. Many additions to these were made by different scholars in different times, and they now number about fifty-six, most of which are now being acted. Many or all of them possess a high order of literary excellence, and are, year after year, prescribed as vernacular text books for University Examinations. [536] [873]

Personal adornment of the actors.—In the beginning the actors had no regular dress as at present, nor was there any curtain dividing the audience from the stage. The only theatrical property known in those days were figures clumsily drawn upon the bark of the areca palm and attached to the bodies of the actors, while the orchestra consisted only of the *maddalam*, a kind of drum. But innovations were soon introduced, and the first of these were those introduced by the Tirúr or Bettattunad Raja. [532] [534] [176]

It may not be out of place here to give a short sketch of a day's performance as it is to-day. A travelling company, which usually consists of twelve actors, four singers, and four musicians who form an "orchestra" with drums (*maddalam* and *chenda*), gongs (*chengalam*) and cymbals (*elathalam*), is invited and lodged in a house near which they are to give the performance. In the morning they are given gingelly oil for an oil-bath, and are then served with rice, *kanji*, and *pappadam*. This forms their breakfast. After it, they retire to sleep till about four o'clock in the afternoon. At five o'clock they are treated to a sumptuous dinner, and half an hour later begins, by beat of drums and other musical instruments of the company, a formal announcement to the villagers in the neighbourhood that a play is to be performed that night. [534] [262] [203]

The stage is nothing more than a crude wooden structure slightly raised from the ground. The drop curtain consists usually of pieces of cloth sewn together and the figure of a god or an animal drawn thereon. The auditorium consists of mats strewn on the floor for the audience to sit on, while two bell-metal lamps, containing cocoanut-oil and wicks of rolled cotton cloth, are the only means of lighting the theatre. Sometimes to add to the solemnity of the occasion conch shells are [345] [354] [534]

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796 of drums, and cannonade of the little mortars. All those who are present are supposed to be fed from the temple.

[564] There is a large crowd. On the morning of the fifth day, a man of the washerman (Vannān) caste will

[203] announce to the neighbours by beat of tom-tom that

[788] there will be a procession of Bhagavati issuing from the gates of the temple, and passing round about. Like all

794 those who are in any way connected with the temple,

796 this man's office is hereditary, and he lives to a small

564 extent on the bounty of the temple, *i.e.*, he holds a little

[428] land on nominal terms from the temple property, in

[425] consideration for which he must fulfil certain requirements for the temple, as on occasions of festivals. His office also invests him with certain rights in the community. In the afternoon of the fifth day, the Vannān and a Manūtan, the one following the other, bring two umbrellas to the temple; the former bringing one of cloth, and the latter one of cadjan (palm leaves). I am not sure whether the cloth umbrella has been in the possession of the Vannān, but think it has. At all events, when he brings it to the temple, it is in thorough repair—a condition for which he is responsible. The cadjan umbrella is a new one. Following these two as they walk solemnly, each with his umbrella, is a large crowd. There are processions of Bhagavati on the elephant encircling the temple thrice in the morning, at noon, and at night. Early on the sixth day, the head-

[326] man of the Mukkuvans (fishermen), who by virtue of his headship is called the Arayan, together with the blacksmith and the goldsmith, comes to the temple, followed by a crowd, but accompanied by no orchestra of drums. To the Arayan is given half a sack of rice for himself and his followers. A silver umbrella belonging to the temple is handed over to him, to be used when